

“Respond to Power”

June 23, 2019

First Christian Church

Scripture Lesson: Luke 8: 26-39

One of the things that sometimes gets lost among an unchainable maniac and a herd of pigs jumping off a cliff, is the sheer power Jesus demonstrates in our Scripture lesson. On the way to this place, Jesus and His disciples encounter a storm violent enough to endanger their very lives, yet Jesus simply rebuked the wind and the waves and the storm fell silent. That is unheard of power over creation. When He arrives, Jesus is confronted by a man who claims the name Legion because he has a legion of demons living within him. In that time and place, a legion meant only one thing. It was a regiment of between 3 and 5 thousand Roman soldiers – a standard occupying force. If we take this information at face value, it means Jesus steps ashore and immediately starts to do battle with 3-5 thousand evil spirits and He wins. Now I am not going to pretend to understand the real power of thousands of demonic evil spirits, but I do know of entire families who have come together to battle one member’s evil spirit of drug addiction, and the family still lost. Multiply that addiction power by thousands, and Jesus still won.

Jesus shows some incredible power here, and He uses that power for good. He saves men’s lives at sea and He not only gives the possessed man his life back, but brings peace to a town that had been tormented for years. The town was unable to contain this mad man with guards or even bind him with chains. Of course the town’s peace came at a price. Jesus cast those evil spirits into a herd of pigs who then proceeded to jump off a cliff into the water and drown. That is a lot of lost bacon.

When the towns people heard about what happened and saw the formerly possessed man sitting in his right mind at Jesus’ feet, they asked Jesus to leave. Why? Why would they do that? Jesus was a man of amazing power. Jesus brought healing to their town. Not only do they no longer have to hire folks to try and guard and restrain this man they used to call Legion, but they can let their children go play without fear and no longer be embarrassed when family comes from out of town. What Jesus did was good and right, so why did they ask Him to leave? It says they were afraid. I get that. There are an infinite number of things to be afraid of. If a guy this powerful comes into town, He might just enslave us all. Initially He uses His power for good, but science fiction stories abound with aliens who arrive in peace and share their technology in helpful ways only to later find they are slowly killing-off the human race so they can have the planet for themselves. To get a little closer to home for the people who were actually there and experienced Jesus’ power, all the Greek and Roman gods they knew were petty and cruel. They liked having temples built for them and enjoyed the cruel sacrifices made on their behalf. Their presence was to be feared, not embraced, for they used their power for their own amusement, not the good of others. In an even more down to earth example, how do you respond when the boss enters the room for the yearly evaluation tour and starts looking over your shoulder, looking into your performance records, and your web browser history? Do we get excited or do

we have a basic fear respond just hoping she leaves soon? When power enters, we have learned to be afraid, and this is not just any powerful being come to their community. This is THE power being. This is the Son of God. As Legion said at their arrival, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" And what is it going to cost me? His first act of healing in town cost a herd of pigs. What is next? Is His next mighty act going to cost my barn, my house, my savings? Since Jesus' power is so much more than anyone else, He is going to want something more. He is going to want something more costly. He is going to want change. He is going to want behavior change. He is going to want attitude change. He is going to want priority change, and many of us would rather skip the healing and keep living with the chaos and brokenness than change. After all, look at that guy who was healed. He is nothing like he was before. Hardly recognizable. What would He change in me? What is He going to tell me I have to do to be healed and to live? What is He going to reveal about me that I don't want to deal with and don't want to change? I am afraid of the price He is going to ask for His healing. I would rather He just leave and take His power with Him. I have adapted to things the way they are. Don't change it. Don't ask me to change. Just leave. It's easier.

I don't know if you have heard, but after next Sunday, I am going to be gone for a while – three months to be exact. I have to tell you, there is a part of me that is afraid. I am not afraid of what is going to happen here while I am gone. You will do great and should really enjoy the opportunities that the elders have lined up for worship. That is not my fear. I am afraid of what God is going to do with me. What changes is He going to work into me? What is He going to reveal to me that I don't want to deal with? So much of my identity is tied up in you and church and what I do here. My very name is Pastor Mike. Who am I when I am not Pastor Mike for 3 months? Am I going to be able to find my identity in my relationship with God through Jesus Christ again as opposed to my relationship with you? And if I do, what is He going to ask me of me? What is He going to ask me to change? I am afraid, but I am going to do my very best to be open to what God needs to do with me. Not control it, which is my nature, but do my best to receive it and change to it. It is not going to be easy. It would be easier to stay in control, but I will do my best **not** to send Jesus away out of fear but open myself to the work He wants to do in me. I hope you will do the same.

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